



Trump's military deportation flights cost more, carry fewer migrants



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The Trump administration's use of military aircraft for deportation flights is running a high price, while at the same time moving fewer migrants than lower-priced commercial charter flights.

The cost of flying C-17 military cargo planes is high, costing roughly \$28,500 per hour of flight time, [according to Reuters](#). The flights — averaging between 10 and 13 hours — take twice as long as chartered removal flights.

The flights with 80 people can cost around \$3,918.75 per person to Guatemala from El Paso, according to an analysis by the El Paso Times using flight tracking software data.

A similar contracted charter deportation flight from El Paso costs taxpayers roughly \$1,168.75 per person to Guatemala. The calculation is based on only 80 people on a removal flight, which generally carry 120 to 125 migrants.

The higher cost of President Donald Trump's military deportations per migrant has raised condemnation from lawmakers.

"It is an abuse of taxpayer resources; it is a violation of the public trust," U.S. Rep. Veronica Escobar, D-El Paso, said. "It's a betrayal of the taxpayer because there is a cheaper alternative."



A C-17 plane with 80 Guatemalan migrants departs from Fort Bliss in El Paso, Texas on Jan. 30, 2025. The Guatemalans were in the U.S. illegally and were repatriated to their country on a military airplane. *Omar Ornelas / El Paso Times*

The cost of operating the deportation flights that use commercial airline charters was listed as [costing \\$8,577 per flight hour](#) in 2021, according to the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency. But Acting ICE Director Tae D. Johnson [told a 2023 congressional budget hearing](#) that the flights cost \$17,000 per hour to operate and averaged around five hours in flight time.

The military deportation flights have returned migrants who illegally crossed the U.S. border to [Guatemala](#), [Ecuador](#), [Honduras](#), [Peru](#), and [India](#).

There have been 10 military deportation flights since Jan. 24, with five landing in Guatemala as of Feb. 4. An estimated 727 people were removed on those flights that departed El Paso, Harlingen, Texas and

Tucson, Arizona.

These five countries agreed to accept the military deportation flights after Trump threatened that they would “pay a high economic price” if they refused the flights.

"For the first time in history, we are locating and loading illegal aliens into military aircraft and flying them back to the places from which they came," Trump said at his Doral golf club on Jan. 27.

The Department of Defense did not immediately respond to requests for more information about military deportation flights.

More: [Migrant encounters in El Paso sector at lowest levels in years](#)

ICE deportations increased late in Biden term

Deportation charters arranged by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency — commonly known as ICE Air — have been common for decades.

The flights are chartered on commercial airlines that crisscross the United States, moving immigrants to six hubs along the U.S. border region in El Paso and other parts of Texas, Arizona and Louisiana. The flights then fly migrants home to Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Ecuador, Colombia and other countries.

These chartered flights have continued daily as the Trump administration carries out the highly visible deportations on military aircraft. There have been around 30 commercial deportation charters since Jan. 24, according to the detailed work compiled by Tom Cartwright with the immigration advocacy group Witness at the Border.



A large group of Guatemalan women are checked before they board a plane to be deported to Guatemala under Title 8 by ICE field office and U.S. Department of Homeland Security personnel on Friday, June 2, 2023. GABY VELASQUEZ/ EL PASO TIMES

The Biden administration carried out 5,518 deportation flights over four years. There were 1,564 deportation flights in the final year of the Biden administration, according to Cartwright.

ICE [removed 271,484 non-citizens](#) in fiscal year 2024, a 90% increase over the previous year.

“Every administration has engaged in deportation efforts,” Escobar said, “that’s never stopped.”

The [chartered flights are facilitated](#) by CSI Aviation, which holds a federal contract to repatriate migrants to their home countries. The Killeen, Texas-based charter company [was awarded a contract valued](#) at about \$359 million from the Department of Homeland Security in April 2024.

The Miami, Florida-based Global Crossings Airlines, or GlobalX, has taken up a large portion of the deportation flights as a subcontractor for CSI Aviation. The company utilizes Airbus planes, including the A320 and A321, according to the [company’s website](#).

GlobalX performed 74% of deportation flights in 2024, according to data collected by Cartwright. Other charter and cargo companies like Eastern Air Express and World Atlantic Airlines occasionally carry out ICE chartered deportations.

GlobalX and CSI Aviation did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Military aircraft complicate ICE deportation tracking

The use of military aircraft is the latest change in the increasingly difficult process of tracking and monitoring deportation flights. Individuals like Cartwright and academic researchers face an uphill battle in collecting data on these flights.

The [University of Washington's Human Rights Center](#) has researched the ICE Air removal flights since 2018, providing clear data on the contracts and companies. However, it has become increasingly difficult to obtain information on the deportation charters.

"We should have access to detailed data about the number of passengers and exactly where they're going," said Phil Neff, a research coordinator with the University of Washington's Human Rights Center. "That information was previously released in our FOIA request, but they're making it more difficult to acquire now."

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